

Interview with the architect Solano Benítez

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It is our great pleasure to welcome Solano Benítez to our university on the occasion of the Vertical Studio taking place this week with the students. We would like to start by confessing that we know nothing about Paraguay. There are no echoes of Paraguay in Portugal. We wanted to ask you to give us some context to help us understand what your country is like.

It's very interesting to understand the process of the first human journey, which started in Africa and then moved eastwards to the Middle East, and then India. India became the crucible of all races, people of all colours and shapes. These then moved into China, before crossing the Bering Strait. After reclaiming and occupying all of Africa, Europe, and Asia, our ancestors entered North America via two routes—the two coasts. At some point, they decided to venture into the Amazon. And that's where Paraguay is, the youngest place in the world. We are the youngest in the world; it is the last place reached during humanity's first round of expansion.



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This is very interesting because we were looking at flights departing from Asunción, which all go to nearby places, except for one that goes to Madrid. It's almost that symmetry you've just described.

We are the youngest on the planet. That in itself is an incredible novelty. Later, when there was expansion northward across the Americas, that region remained somewhat isolated because of the mountain ranges. Then, the Guaraní appeared and were later transformed into the Tupí-Guaraní. They moved further away and became the Caribs. *Caraí* means man, and *caraíbe* means the ultimate man. For example, *Itamaraty* is *Itá* morotí: *itá* is stone, *morotí* is white. Thus it is with each of the words about everything that happens in the heart of South America, which is precisely marked by this final arrival. In Peru, there are people dating back to the time of the pyramids; that is to say, when those pyramids were being built, these cities were being built as well. But the final fact is that, once everything along the edges is established, that's when things truly begin. First, the perimeter is known, and then the area, as a way of being. Then the Portuguese arrive, the Spaniards, and the struggle begins. The Portuguese start pushing the borders and diverting the course, leading to conflict in the interior, where the Portuguese crown and the Spanish crown begin to clash. Then, a zone is established to calm things down, and that's where the Guaranitic reductions are created. This is where the Jesuit territory emerges, as it was neither Portuguese nor Spanish, and they maintained a sort of neutrality. Out of that entire process, Paraguay arises. If the Portuguese GPS had been working properly, Brazil would be smaller. But the GPS failed, and the crown reached the Río de la Plata and the foothills of Paraguay. Meanwhile, as England moved into India and tried to reach Tokyo, the rest of Asia, and Malaysia, a fierce dispute unfolded here between the two great powers over this territory. Here lie all the myths and all the legends. It's also interesting to think that when this was Pangaea, we were very close to the Orange River in South Africa, where all the diamonds and gold are. When this landmass separated, that platform became the beach—the Atlantic coast of Brazil. On the other side, it collided with the platform to form a mountain range, the Pacific Cordillera. On the African side, all of this becomes like a cliff—only later do the beaches emerge as everything begins to move northward. This explains that, in the end, we are the same, and we might have originally been very close. But the land had already changed, and this territory was formed, marked by that novelty. We are the new ones, and that's why no one knows us. That's some of the story, there are traces from that era. For example, a fascinating fact: the rain that fell used to drain into rivers flowing the other way, so the original direction of the Amazon was different. When the collision occurred, the Amazon had to change direction, which is why there are vast areas with saline remnants—because they were once flooded and left with completely different conditions.

And you mentioned that Paraguay is very close to sea level...

Of course, we are 1,200 km from the sea, at an elevation of 60 or 62 metres. It's absolutely flat, and because it's so flat and so low, and located in the centre of the continent, all the heat acts like a pressure cooker over this place.



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And it's also a place with very slow-moving waters...

It has very slow-moving waters, with a lot of filtration. And there is also the Guaraní aquifer, which is the largest aquifer in the world's freshwater reserves; it is the most important underground water source.

Paraguay is truly at the centre of everything. It is new and at the centre.

The reality is that there's an undeniable process of globalization, and everywhere in the world now shares a similar condition: they harbour extreme poverty in some areas and extreme wealth in others. This imbalance, which didn't exist in the same way before, is now permanent, present and evident everywhere—it's striking. We used to talk about "first-world" countries, developed nations with no poverty. Today, you can go on "favela tours" in Paris and London. Before, to witness poverty, you had to visit South America—see a *villa* in Argentina, a *favela* in Brazil, or what we call *añareta* in Paraguay. "*Aña*" means devil, and "*reta*" means land—the little land of the devil. This refers to those settlements where people who have no means of shelter establish makeshift homes. These are typically places where no one with any degree of stability would choose to live—such as riverbanks that flood and subside, forcing people to keep moving. But it's no different from Charles-Édouard Jeanneret (Le Corbusier), who left Switzerland after he ran out of money and went to Paris, where he had no means of surviving. The only job he could find was managing a brick kiln by the Seine. The Seine would rise, flooding the area, he would be without work. Then he would return when the waters subsided. This, in theory, is what happened to our greatest architectural idol. It was his way of surviving against the harsh forces of nature—trying to negotiate chaos and find stability and another solution. In Paraguay, it's interesting that some applaud the idea that we



think the way we do because we have a scarcity of resources. But that's not the reality. People in Paraguay drive Ferraris, they drive Bugattis, demonstrating a very specific response to the rest of society – solid indifference. One can stroll with indifference past a favela wearing trainers costing thousands of dollars. In societies like ours—which are, in fact, like societies everywhere—we have people who live in identical conditions. Some have access to more resources, while others have significantly less, relatively speaking. If you walk on the outskirts of San Francisco, near the Google headquarters, you'll find homeless people. People who barely survive the elements, who wake up dead from the cold, or dead from excessive heat, or because they could only eat expired, contaminated food, as they have no way of defending themselves. Acquiring this solid indifference became a societal tool to try and survive in a "survival of the fittest" world. The idea that we could evolve was abandoned. It's like in the 1950s when cartoons presented two contrasting visions. The Flintstones, who were Neolithic and had stone phones, stone cars, stone washing machines, etc.; and the Jetsons, with their dog Astro, who ate pills, flew around, and everything was futuristic and advanced etc. That was the 1950s and 1960s. We were raised with those cartoons, but later, around the 1980s, *Mad Max* came along. And when *Mad Max* arrives, everything survives at the same time: the rich, opulence, those with knowledge, those with resources, and those without resources. Confrontation between groups became increasingly apparent. I suppose that if we cannot figure out how to coexist, if we abandon the attempt to do so and simply accept indifference as the only way of relating to one another, we move closer to an apocalyptic society. My six-year-old nephew, for example, comes to my house and says, "Uncle, this house is a post-apocalyptic house." And why is that? Because everything there are ordinary resources, but they're enhanced in some way. He clearly reads it. In other words, this isn't normal—this is common, typical, but it's not normal. It's arranged differently, based on another type of response. Even a little child is able to understand this. And when that child perceives the difference, they are also showing everyone that there are other resources, other ways to do things—not indifference. It's not about everyone creating and celebrating their own culture, their own tools, but that we can try, with support from everyone, other ways of producing and another way of understanding each other.

When did you realise that? When did you recognise this ability, that resources speak precisely about that? Because it seems obvious, and it's an inescapable topic. When you look at a brick, you're already talking about all of that.

I suppose it comes largely from my learning process, because if I have to talk about teaching, I wouldn't be able to say anything at all. I come from one of the worst universities, and to this day, the same corrupt professors who taught me are still teaching in the faculty where I now teach. I'm no longer young; I'm 60 years old, and the others are 80 or 90, but they're still there, stuck, trying to make the world be one way or another. But during my learning process, the following happened: I was 17 years old, I had already entered architecture school, but I had also completed three years of military service. In other words, they were teaching me to kill, but they wouldn't let me drink beer, for example.



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It was still a dictatorship, right?

Yes, it was during the dictatorship, and in a dictatorship, I don't believe anyone is truly a fan of the dictator; what exists is a society that hates change. The dictatorship is not sustained by love for a tyrannical regime as the way to solve things, but because it maintains the status quo, for the sake of stability. In terms of making sure nothing moves, nothing at all. So, for example, it was common near the cathedral in Asunción that people who migrated from the countryside and lost their land would hide behind a façade of plywood. People lived behind that curtain of shame. Even though there was a difference, a change, they had to do whatever it took to ensure that nothing changed. I started university at 17, and shortly after I turned 18 and got my driver's licence and was hired by an engineering firm. My job was to drive a truck to avoid paying freight costs. I had to transport materials to the construction site to make sure work could continue, but I couldn't just bring the bricks and wait until all of them were there, then bring the sand, then the cement, because work would come to a halt. So I had to know how many square metres needed to be completed each day, how much cement was required, how much sand, how many bricks would be laid, and based on that, I had to drive the truck back and forth. There was also the issue of weight—if I overloaded the truck, it would break down, and I would be fired. So, the weight issue was important. At that moment, I understood that I had all the necessary training to do it—to add and subtract, to know how many bricks were needed, to calculate the area, the length by width; that's simple math. To calculate that, in so many hours, so many metres are built, to know if it was done slowly or quickly, etc. These are things that simple math provides, and it's what they teach you in school. That's enough to operate within a construction site. Then, seeing the first wall was marvellous. I was watching it, and it was a magical moment. The second wall—so heavy. The third—extremely boring. The fourth—oh my God... It

was like Sisyphus pushing the stone uphill every day. The guy would start every day making a maximum effort, using all his physical strength, gathering his forces and pushing the stone, and he had to do the same thing again, every day. I was desperate because I didn't want to be there in the sun, alongside them. I used to ask myself: Can't we make it another way? Can't we do something? Why don't we think a little? Why don't we change the schedule? Why don't we start later? Earlier? Why don't we stay later? etc."



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Were you still in school?

No, I was in my first year of university, and I was already connected to that world. Then what I began to understand, perhaps because I was very active in politics in Paraguay, was the strong opposition to the dictatorship. The opposition that survived came from the church. The church was the one confronting the regime, and the dictatorship didn't dare go against the church. If you were active within a political party, you were exiled or disappeared; but if you were active within the church, you could aspire to bring about change. You could be arrested, but not disappeared; they could beat you, but not torture you—that's a big difference. The Catholic Church was official and received a state salary; the bishop had the same salary as a general, the parish priest received the salary of a colonel, and the priest was paid the salary of a sergeant. On top of the collection, the state was also giving them money. To what extent could you react against that? At that moment, I actually began to become aware of the possibility of change, but changes appeared when I myself attempted to build. At first, I would make plans, drawings, and layouts, for which I had to use a rapidograph, a drafting machine, and all those kinds of things. You had to be somewhat skilled at it, it took too many hours, and they paid me very little, but what paid the most were perspectives. So, I started doing perspectives to

work less. I was always looking for ways to have more time to read more and do other things that interested me. Until the moment I decided to start my own practice. When I decided to start my practice, I was already married, had started building, the coup had happened, and I had lost my job. It's not that I changed on account of a whim, I was pressured to such an extent that I had to either make changes or train myself to be indifferent. That's when I decided: no, we're going to change. That's when I learned to follow my intuitions and then show them to others. It was always quite clear; it was always a money issue. Although my family was well-off, my father died when I was 26, and the first thing I did was renounce my inheritance because I had younger siblings who were 12 years old, and I was already an architect. At 23, I had already finished university, had three years of experience, I got married, and my father passed away. Not only that, but my first wife, who was also an architect, had family members who were experiencing financial difficulties. So, from one day to the next, we had to start living. I had, of course, the option of the architect's business card, the ministry, whatever it was, I had the doors open to do that. But I decided not to, that I had to face those consequences. It's not easy, right? Because when one confronts the structure and shows a possibility or a resource, that resource always comes from criticism. Criticism in the sense of evaluating what is being done, which reveals a change, and change is the enemy. Change is what gives you the most uncertainty. Architecture costs a lot of money. How do you even think of starting to play in a territory where everything costs so much money? Because if you want to dedicate yourself to being an artist, you'll rip a canvas, but as an architect... what if it fails? Then, another process begins, a process completely alien to and against the school. It's above all the change that makes one move from teaching to learning, which is completely different. When you're in the latter phase, you're passive, waiting to be told what to do, and you choose whether to incorporate it or not. When you're in the process of learning and experimenting, everything is of interest, because anything might save you from a mistake you're about to make or that is about to happen.

And how did those initial experiments come about?

Because I had very little money and needed to survive. I either gave up my life aspirations and became what society expected me to be as an architect, or I started to change and limited myself to those resources. It was then that I made my first office. Architects would come to see it and say: "Where's the little bag, like the ones on airplanes, for throwing up?" Because it wasn't a proper construction—it was more like a chicken coop.

Are you referring to the project you showed us a few days ago, with the small buttresses, right?

Yes, with the buttresses, with the window used as a beam, which reused bricks without removing them, with plastering used as insulation, with the use of formwork wood as insulation rather than as a ceiling. For the ceiling, I didn't really care, but I had to deal with the heat. I needed to make it retain heat and then expel it. So, I started to think about everything in those terms. What I haven't mentioned yet is that my mother's house, which I built many years later, cost 100 dollars per square metre—at a time when the average cost per square metre was 500 dollars. But for my office, I had 5,000 dollars, and it was 100 square metres; that means I built it with 50 dollars per square metre.



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That involved a lot of physical labour on your part, didn't it?

For some aspects, yes—making doors and that sort of thing. There's always an invention that solves the problem. But the way to explain to the world what I was doing was always using economics. Economics could demonstrate the value of these things. Because if it cost the same and was simply a matter of style, what was the point? Nowadays, you buy jeans that are all ripped because it's a "poor style." But first the jeans are made, and then they're torn to create that style. And how much do they cost? The same as a complete pair of jeans. But what if, during the process of making the jeans, they're slightly torn and cost 100 times less than the others? There's an ethical component that addresses the difference.

It's interesting that in your lectures you always talk about a minimal dimension—referring to these works and small inventions—but you then connect it to the world through economy and resources.

The good thing is to try to be the most Portuguese Paraguayan architect possible. In the sense that I don't deny I'm from Paraguay, and so forth. But if there's one thing that is characteristic of our time, it's this extraordinary capacity for connection, which didn't exist previously. Now my friends can speak to me at any time. When Lisbon was the Ibero-American capital of culture, I met Ángelo, Álvaro, Vinicius, Inês, Manuel Aires, Francisco Aires at an event for architects under 30. We were all around the same age, under 30, and came here to try to show our little things. After all, we had two options for communicating: either we spoke very fast because it cost a fortune, and that bill was going to arrive at the end of the month, or we had to write a letter and post it, and it would take a month to arrive. But today, people I met in India call me—that's an everyday thing



in my life, it's already a part of the relationships I have. That expanded universe is impressive; it's a powerful symbol of this era. That's very interesting because it also forces you to put things into perspective. This was Pangaea, just a single piece of land that, when it split apart, positioned itself at different latitudes on the globe, and underwent transformation as a result. But we are the same people who journeyed and arrived here; we are one big family inhabiting the same planet, with an incredible capacity for connection. Hopefully, we can agree to resolve things, not through indifference, but by taking action to transform and improve them. Knowledge, which is the attribute of erudition, is about recognizing differences. Understanding is about building similarities—it's realizing that here, in the Fertile East, taking a piece of earth and making a brick is something that accompanied the expansion of humanity. There is nothing more global a material than that same brick, shaped by hand and made with the form and weight of the hand itself. That tool was global because it was used, with certain characteristics, to build a house. For example, in the coffee plantations on the outskirts of São Paulo, we could imagine the *piano nobile* with a double brick wall, and below, in the basement, the slaves were standing, so their heat would rise and keep the rooms warm. This shows we are capable of any, even the most atrocious, kind of reasoning. After all, we can still imagine that Hitler did things like extinguish life in a shower. But to stand as a slave all your life to heat and provide comfort for others? We, humans, have done such things. With the same brick used to lovingly build a structure to protect our mother, we made a form to impose ourselves and build the worst version of all of us. That version is based on the understanding that we are not actually a person who adapts to different circumstances, but rather we can be the same person who must impose ourselves under all circumstances in the same way. This is akin to the ambition of all products at the beginning of the industrial era. Today, it's hard to understand how a Volkswagen can work equally well in Alaska and the Sahara, but that was the ambition.

Since we are in the middle of this Vertical Studio, we've asked the students what question they would like to ask you. They are very intrigued by this idea of experimenting with making things in brick, now, in this century, in Lisbon. How can they understand that this is a virtuous possibility?

We were just talking about a Volkswagen that worked in the desert and in Alaska as an ambition. I do believe that we will always keep on doing the same thing; what we do is build to protect. That is the same, that doesn't change at all. Originally, what we do is build to protect. To do this, we have all the resources around us. Those resources stem from many actions and transformations we've undertaken: industry, tradition, history. Originally, a house was built from earth or logs, then from boards, then paper, then whatever was at hand. However, there are more and more of us, and resources are starting to become scarce. If the best thing we have done as human beings has left more than 60% of the world's population in poverty, then if we keep on doing what we do, the way we do it, we will only perpetuate that same situation. The gap between those who have less and the few who have more will continue widening. We have an imperative to try other things. Free observation of the resources we have, not by tradition, not through commerce, but through simple observation and the use of intelligence to take responsibility for our decisions, is all we've got. I believe the way we produce or stabilize matter will radically change in the coming years. For instance, there didn't used to be multi-layered wood, let alone wood with such thin dimensions before we developed the pencil sharpener, which transformed logs. This was an incredible technological breakthrough, and we achieved it. We are evolving a lot. But if, in doing so, we neglect



the rest of humanity, we are obliged to start over— now with the ambition to create more answers. That's where I think we're heading in the coming years: a migration from physics. We'll stop summoning materials through physics and chemistry and start summoning them through biology. Even when we start summoning materials through biology, matter will appear, and we'll have to invent what we do with it. Invention, imagination, the work of the mind—these are exercises we must cultivate and produce. It's not about waking up one day and deciding, "Now I'm going to be creative." When one starts observing things and trying to solve them in their own way, one begins to unlock increasingly greater resources. If, on the other hand, one merely disciplines oneself and limits ones thinking to what already exists, the outcome of that exercise is predictable from the start. So, any imaginative process that promotes those changes is welcome. Not because it's more interesting to cover that exercise with a small brick or a panel, that just demonstrates that even the longest-standing protocol in history—making bricks for over 3,000 years—can still be done differently. We can still use bricks in a different way, and by doing so, we free up resources for people. That's why the economic aspect is fundamental, and why efficiency is essential—because there are so many of us now that the way we build and the availability of materials demand that we invent new approaches. I believe it's just as valid to work with a mycelium brick or a basil-and-pasteuri brick as it is with a ceramic brick. Yes, they are different; one will break more easily and the other less easily, one will be easier to attach and the other not, one will be lighter, the other heavier. But that's just an attribute. What matters is imagining what to do with them. Every resource has a way of resolving an issue. Every decision leads to a final form and a final method, which is simply the consequence of the choices we make. Let me put it another way: imagine a Formula 1 race 10 years ago. In the stands, you see all the Ferrari fans waving their flags with the prancing horse emblem. Schumacher drives by, and people kneel, hailing the best car in the world, the best driver in the world—a magical, unforgettable moment. Everyone is filled with pride, cheering and clapping. But across the street, the engineers are talking: "Schumacher pulled that move again, the one we told him not to! Call the brake engineer—it's the worst brake in history, and it's killing us." It's the same race; the same thing is happening. Now, which side do you want to be on? The side where you simply applaud and accept what's handed to you? Or the side where you do and create? I chose the other side.



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On the first day of this Vertical Studio, you told students that you learn by doing, and you spoke a lot about mistakes. What role do mistakes play in the deep research process we discern in your work? What is the connection between error and learning?

I'm not sure if it's deep research, but it is constant. If there's one thing that perhaps sets me apart from what is produced in the world, it's the consistency of starting a project to learn something and develop that something—it's an opportunity. In projects that took a bit longer, like building one vault and six months later another, the second vault was different. The design happened simultaneously, but the first was built first, and what I learned from that experiment was never repeated in the second. I was already trying something else. The errors I encountered early on taught me a lot, which meant the next step was different. Then, new errors emerged, teaching me something else, and something else after that. What exists is that persistence in the act of insisting. It is not an aesthetic stance; it's a committed stance, an ethical stance. Behind the risk assumed—because it is a risk to fail—lies the fact that society can hunt you down at any moment, because you have no safeguards. You're doing something that is forbidden, that isn't covered by the regulations, which isn't legal. Why does one do all that? Perhaps in architecture, one cannot achieve that result in any other way than through a state of mind that leads you to an understanding that one is the other, and that one needs to care for the other in order to live better.



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We don't live in a particular place; we live in a particular society. And that's an important distinction. I understand that the place where one lives is society, and that society exists to the extent that we construct it. If you internalise that indifference, you will not have a

relationship with anyone. You will try to exploit, dominate, impose, or take from society rather than contribute to it. But if one understands that, in this relationship with the other, one *is* the other, then a loving relationship with the other emerges. It is this loving condition that allows you to step up and take responsibility. Otherwise, what's the point? Will you just wait for someone else to do it? I believe that, above all, we live in a society. I taught in Chicago for a little over a year, and I have very dear, close friends just 200 kilometres south of the city. I also taught in other places, like at the GSD in Boston. Today, I am very close friends with people from the GSD who are from other countries. That's my universe—I live within that society, and this society requires care and commitment. This society must manifest itself through actions. That's important because it's the difference between Paraguay as a place and Paraguay as a kind of society. In reality, the geographical aspect no longer matters; it's the connection with people that matters. There's something Humberto Maturana said that I find very interesting. He said that the way to control us and prevent change is through fear. Fear immobilizes us. In engineering schools, I often laugh because they say that in the first year, they teach "fear 1"; in the second year, "fear 2"; in the third year, "terror 3"; in the fourth year, "panic 4," and so on. But fear isn't just about things collapsing—it's about the fear that when you research or innovate, society will punish you by cutting off your cell phone or preventing you from connecting with your friends from other places. You can't buy a cell phone because society is controlling you, telling you: "If you keep doing that nonsense, I won't support you anymore, I won't give you any more money." And if you don't have money, what will you do? How will you connect? So, how do you stand up to the fear that controls and makes everything the same? There are a thousand ways to promote fear. Humberto Maturana used to say: "I was never afraid because my mom always loved me." He said, essentially, that when I was an idiot, unable to even feed myself, my mother's unconditional love allowed me to fail so many times until I became this person who eats, who talks, who walks. But to be able to walk I fell down seventy times; to be able to eat, I made a mess of myself over and over again. This is why it's so crucial to promote relationships that help recognize and bring out this "other" as part of ourselves. Because that's the way to tell someone they're doing it right. It must be difficult, we don't really know how to do it, but someone has to create change. And why? Because poverty, climate change, and all the indicators are bearing down on us now, and they're warning us that we are on the path to catastrophe.

Another interesting aspect of your work is scale. You work with the scale of the body, with the brick, but your projects are becoming increasingly larger in scale. This shift in scale also reflects the network of connections you're establishing, and it impacts the scale of transformation. How will you maintain consistency between these two scales?

I don't know. It's another fear. I think that changing scale is a privilege because, when I worked for engineers, the projects I handled were houses. Back then, they wouldn't have given me a building to design. A house was something I could manage, and they could recover from any mistakes I might make. They allowed me to do certain things—I think it's part of the process. Architecture is an old person's game; it's not a young person's game. I'm sorry for the students, but unfortunately, it's an old person's game in the sense that the training you go through is important. It's not like a young athlete who peaks in their youth. It's the opposite. I hope it's like that, and I feel that way. I feel I have infinite possibilities that come from having gone through all of it. If I hadn't started, if I hadn't done that small project, and then another, linked to the level of commitment I could

handle, I wouldn't be where I am now. One grows in that process. During that process, one goes through situations that are, of course, extraordinarily tough and painful, but no one is exempt from that. For example, unfortunately it is very common in the construction world for failures and mistakes to occur. A worker might fall suddenly, or something might become detached, despite trying to do things well—despite that, it happens. Now imagine when something like that happens in a setting where you're also experimenting. You're totally exposed, completely without a safety net. The act of doing it is only justified by the understanding that the result will be extraordinary. Perhaps some people think that when one writes poetry, being so sensitive is dreadful. Why do it? Because the act of connecting feelings to reason and giving them structure through poetry produces such ecstasy—it's very much like the biggest dose of dopamine you've ever experienced in your life. That's what happens when you do something like that. It's highly self-motivating because what you create celebrates what you've endured and offers an intellectual joy that might not otherwise be so profound. So, we do what we do, not only out of social commitment but also because it's a source of immense pleasure and a feeling of absolute fulfilment. It's the same thing musicians experience when they play music, or poets and painters when they express themselves. They're satisfying a series of mechanisms that come from doing, learning, and all that, which align with the thrill and fear of letting go—of taking the leap. And when that moment happens, it's a gift. Who can mistreat someone who comes bearing a gift? No one.



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It's such a beautiful message for the students...

Yes, it's very motivating—it gives life a sense of meaning and fulfilment that would be impossible otherwise. If you dedicate your life to this, could the reward be just economic? Would anyone do what they do purely for money? I think not. It wouldn't be worth it. What

I've done is absolutely worth it—tremendously so—but not because of money. Money might be a consequence, but it's not the reason. The reasons for doing what I do are precisely what drive me. Perhaps that's why I'm so connected to learning processes, why I teach, why I give classes at public universities, and why I remain committed to sharing knowledge.

What question would you like to be asked?

How is the world you live in? Or: How do you see the world? How do you bring everything together to shape your life? How do you manage your life to achieve what you want? What is your house like? That's always a lovely question, one that isn't necessarily about architecture. It's not an apartment, it's not a house, it doesn't have two floors—above all, because we are biological beings, absolutely, just like any other animal. And all animals, in one way or another, make a nest for themselves. It's a biological condition, this instinct to create a place to rest, to make a shelter for rainy days, a place to take cover and develop some sort of strategy—that's where they live, right? We are no different. We still have that fundamental drive, but with the extraordinary potential to craft it to our own measure. And if we can shape it to fit us perfectly, that will be the best house—not the one given to you or the one you buy. In my country, for example, there's a lot of talk about the *sintecho*—the homeless. And why should people have a roof over their heads, or the landless? Why should people own land? I think an Indigenous person—or even us—would find it very strange if I were to declare myself the owner of this amount of air around me, or claim ownership of a certain number of cubic metres of the river flowing in front of me, or of the sea. Yet, when it comes to deciding where to live, we buy a fragment of the planet Earth, called a plot, and I'm given a title certifying that I own that plot. I can take out a loan on it, or pass it on to my children—a concept that is absurdly arbitrary and unquestioned. I can't imagine a bird asking for proof of ownership of a branch. And yet, we base our entire societal and economic system on this. So yes, I like to imagine that we can think with that kind of freedom, that perhaps we don't need to be owners of something or not. And that doesn't mean we shouldn't question how we ought to live, or what agreements we need to make to avoid recklessly depleting everything around us, to not exhaust resources, but instead to preserve, cultivate, produce, and so on—whatever will contribute to living better. It's simply that— it doesn't mean that Roman law is unalterable or irrevocable. Yes, it was an arbitrary way at some point, but I'm not sure if it can still be the same as before. So, if we have the capacity ability to observe freely what exists around us and summon it from an inner ethic that drives us to be with others and for others, then everything is up for reinvention—a wonderful prospect. We can invent all kinds of societies, cities, homes, and so on.

Thank you very much.